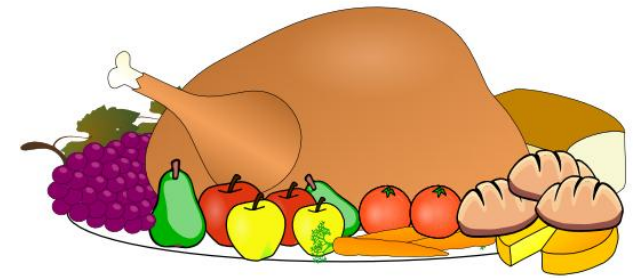


Who's Behind the Platter?

Thinking of Farm Workers on Thanksgiving



Farm workers make our meals possible, and without them food-filled holidays like Thanksgiving wouldn't be the same.

But at what cost to them?

Farm workers are one of the most highly at risk social groups in our country. They make low wages, work long hours in dangerous conditions, lack access to unions and proper healthcare, and many are undocumented.

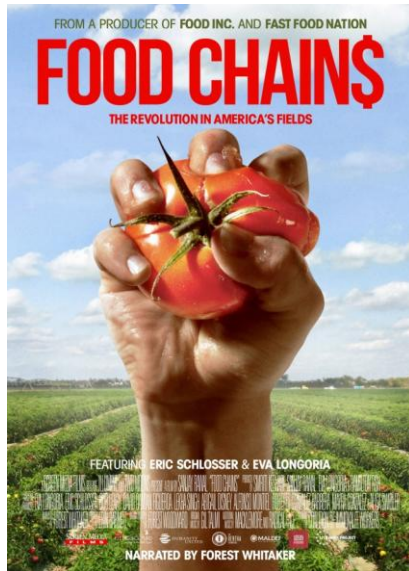
And yet, we depend on their risky work all of the time.

Perhaps we need to take a closer look at who exactly is behind the platter this Thanksgiving.

- **There are an estimated 3 million farm workers in the United States.**
- **Over 50% of these farm workers lack official documentation, which puts them at risk of abuse and deportation.**
- **85% of fruits and vegetables produced in the US are picked by farm workers by hand.**
- **The average farm worker makes only \$11,000/yr, but the fruit & vegetable industry generates an estimated \$28 billion/yr.**

***“Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”—
James 5:4***

How Can We Support Justice for Farm Workers?



- Watch the documentary “**Food Chains**” on iTunes or sponsor a group showing to learn about farm worker abuse in the United States and the complicity of the multibillion dollar supermarket and fast food industries Go to: <http://www.foodchainsfilm.com>
- Learn about and join the Wendy’s boycott. Go to: www.boycott-wendys.org
- Encourage your local Wendy’s restaurant to join the “Fair Food Program” by downloading a letter [here](#) to take to the store manager. Remind them they are the *only one* of the top five fast food businesses in the U.S. to not yet sign on to support farm workers!
- Learn more about the Fair Food Program at: <http://www.fairfoodprogram.org/> and how it increases farm worker wages and protects from abuse in the fields!
- Join in the work of the **National Farm Worker Ministry!**—<http://nfwm.org>

Stories & Faces of Those Who Grow the Food for Our Feast



In November of 2014, farm workers and friends from around the U.S. gathered outside the White House to spread a Thanksgiving Table and communicate how farm worker efforts fill holiday tables for us all! Hear their stories and see their photos below as you prepare for your own Thanksgiving celebration!



PUMPKIN grower **Maria Martha Acevedo Cardenas** from Sunnyside, WA recalls the sacrifices farm workers make behind every meal, saying, "I'm not asking for pity, but I am asking for what's fair. Others are able to eat the best produce, while we are unable to afford the same fruits and vegetables we picked. One day, I would like to be able to buy my own Thanksgiving turkey. Martha also works at Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery. She came to the U.S. in 1985 from Mexico in search of a better life for herself and her small son. She has also worked in apples, tomatoes, cherries, asparagus, green beans, onions, grapes and pears. On an average workday, Martha wakes up at 3 or 4 a.m. to be at work by 6 or 7 a.m." Her U.S. citizen daughter, **Eustalia (Toy) A. Acevedo**, picks **APPLES** in Seattle, WA., climbing up and down a ladder 8 or 9 hours a day, carrying a bag that she fills with at least 40 pounds of apples before dumping them into a bin. She fills that bag at least 7 times a day. She says, "When the average American eats that apple pie or a dish with apples on Thanksgiving, they need to realize without farm workers picking their fruits or vegetables there wouldn't be a Thanksgiving meal."

Maria Arteaga harvests **POTATOES** in Parma, ID. The planting process for potatoes is a long one because she has to be sure only the best "eyes of potatoes" are used, and she has to cut the potatoes carefully yet swiftly with a knife without cutting herself. Maria has been in the U.S. for 23 years. Years ago she and her husband were stopped and subsequently deported for "looking suspicious" while on a road trip to Los Angeles. At the time her small children, including daughter Areli, then 5, had stayed home with a relative. "Once I was deported, all I could think about was my children. I had to get back to them, so I did what any mother would have done. I made the sacrifice and returned to the U.S. illegally." Her daughter now helps with corn harvesting when she comes home from college where she studies as a double major in political science and business. Areli says: "I want people to think about something before they bite into their corn on the cob: some people, unlike them, can't be sitting at the table enjoying a Thanksgiving meal with their family because they can't travel out of the country to see them or because their family has been deported."





San Juanita Marquez works at a **POULTRY** processing plant worker in Lumber Bridge, NC. She explains the perils of life as an undocumented worker: “If immigration (U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement) comes to the plant or my house, I could be separated from my children. My youngest children are American citizens, and because I have no family here, they would be left alone and be sent to foster care if I was deported. It would be too dangerous to take them back to Guerrero where children and the elderly are gunned down in gang violence. I ask Obama to stop the deportations – let us work and let us keep our children safe.”

Inocencio Bernal Pedroza picks **CELERY** in Madera, CA., like that often used in stuffing at Thanksgiving. Inocencio is proud that the celery, grapes, cauliflower, and peaches he has picked are used to make delicious dishes at Thanksgiving. He reminds, “Farm workers contribute to the U.S. economy, but many of them are undocumented and are not treated equally or acknowledged for their work. They provide food for American families. Americans should try to have their Thanksgiving meal without undocumented farm workers toiling in the fields. There would be no dinner! There's produce in the supermarkets because farm working hands put it there.” Inocencio has worked in the Central Valley since 1991. He knows that more work needs to be done to improve the conditions for farm workers. He says, “I, and other farm workers, are willing to work, willing to help, willing to contribute to the economy of this country. We have hope and faith that our company will implement a contract to better protect workers in our company.” His employer has refused to sign a mediated contract for many years, and will require many to work on Thanksgiving Day without holiday pay.



Alberto Bermejo is 44, and picks **PEACHES** in Sanger, CA. This year alone, Alberto harvested peaches for 6 months. He said peaches are most often used to make peach pie or cobbler on Thanksgiving. On an average workday, Alberto climbs up and down a ladder to pick peaches for at least 8 hours. He picks peaches from at least 80 trees a day. While many of us are still sleeping, Alberto begins his workday at 5:30 a.m. Alberto came to the U.S. in 1986. He is grateful that his hard work will feed Americans this Thanksgiving. But, he says, “If we're not in the fields picking the peaches, then people won't be served on Thanksgiving. A little appreciation for what we do would go a long way.” Other crops Alberto has worked in include nectarines, olives, and oranges.



Juan and Maria Pacheco achieved American citizenship after years of working at a **TURKEY** processing plant in Mifflintown, PA. Today they called for executive action on behalf of their undocumented coworkers. Said Juan, “Families all across the country are going to be eating our turkeys next week, but they don’t know the stories behind their Thanksgiving dinner. My wife and I worked in the Empire Kosher turkey plant for fifteen years before we finally earned American citizenship. We have worked hard to earn our American Dream. I want to stay here all of my life, working hard.”



Stories provided by the United Farm Workers (www.ufw.org) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (www.ufcw.org)

Photos by Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries; ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org.

For Additional Holy Days & Holidays Resources, go to: www.interfaithimmigration.org

For Further Information about Farm Worker Campaigns, go to: www.nfwm.org



The Cries of the Harvesters

A Collection of Prayer Resources Remembering & Honoring Farm Workers

A Thanksgiving Litany from Interfaith Worker Justice <http://www.iwj.org/>

Speaker: O God of seed and harvest, the meal before us is a sight to behold and we are grateful.

Response: The meat and the vegetables, the fruit and bread, the drink and fellowship of this meal are gifts from Your mighty hand and outstretched arm

Speaker: This turkey has given up life so that we might have life.

Response: We are mindful of the sacrifice—the exchange of death for life—associated with our being fed and nourished.

Speaker: From egg to chick to bird to food, countless human hands have brought this turkey to our table.

Response: We are grateful for the farmers, the poultry plant workers, the shippers and market place workers, and those who have prepared this meal.

Speaker: We are sorry and repent for any suffering, abuse or exploitation that workers feel as the result of their labor on our behalf.

Response: We commit ourselves to eat this meal in peace, and rise from this table for work for justice and harmony on the earth and among the people of the earth.

ALL: Taste and see how good God is!

Thanksgiving Grace from Interfaith Worker Justice

O God of seed and harvest, we pause to give thanks for the table set before us and the food that graces it.

[The people gathered take turns naming the various foods on the table being blessed, by saying, “thank you for the _____” until all the foods have been named.]

In a moment we will eat this food, harvested from many parts of the nation and world. It will be transformed into the flesh and blood of our bodies. Keep us mindful of the many workers who labor in field and factory to bring us this food.

From the bounty and nourishment of the meal, we dedicate ourselves to work to abolish poverty, unsafe working conditions, workplace abuse, and unjust wages among those who feed us through their labor.

We pray this in the name of the Creator God, who not only fed the Israelites in the desert but transformed simple folk like us into disciples for justice and peace. Amen.

Blessing Prayer from National Farm Worker Ministry <http://nfwm.org/>

Bless the hands of the people of the earth,
The hands that plant the seed,
The hands that bind the harvest,
The hands that carry the burden of life.
Soften the hands of the oppressor and
Strengthen the hands of the oppressed.
Bless the hands of the workers,
Bless the hands of those in power above them
That the measure they deal will be tempered
With justice and compassion. Amen.



Prayer of Repentance from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Leader: God, for enjoying the foods in our hands without remembering the hands that grew them,

All: We ask your pardon, Lord.

Leader: For too long enjoying the fruits of others' labors without praying for those who harvest our fruit,

All: We pray now for those who work in the fields.

Leaders: For farmworker brothers and sisters who too often suffer wage and physical abuse, crying out from the fields,

All: Help us join with their cries to ask and work for justice.

Leader: As you asked us to seek mercy for the neglected and give love to the vulnerable,

All: We seek your forgiveness for those we have too often forgotten. Give us your strength to renew our courage, and build solidarity and love with farmworkers who make possible our feasts. AMEN.

For more resources, please visit our Interfaith Immigration Coalition website at:
interfaithimmigration.org. To learn more about how you can support actions for farm
worker justice, go to: **www.nfwm.org**